Sadiya,
Assam.

9th July, 1933.

My dear Malinowski,

You will think it like me to break a silence of two years and then ask a kindness in the same breath; but the dak from this end of Assam is a slow and chancy business, and a man learns to hoard up his requests against the day the bag goes down to the plains. I hope this finds you and yours well. I am set down at Sadiya for some weeks yet, upon a survey of the tribes of this frontier, and have at last the leisure to write.

I am writing about a young man of these hills, in whom I have come to take an uncommon interest, and for whom I should dearly like to open a door that has never, so far as I know, been opened to one of his people before.

His name is Tati Lego. He is an Abor, of the Dihang valley above Pasighat, a lad come up from amongst the savages of those hills. He had what schooling he has from the American Baptist Mission at Sadiya, where, I understand, they made a Christian of him besides; and he holds to the Christian way with a steadiness one does not always meet in better-taught men. For this past year and more he has worked at my side as my assistant, and I do not know when I have been better served. In the questioning of headmen, in the setting down of their customs and their speech, and in the hundred small offices of a touring camp, he has been of the greatest help to me; and I have come to think a great deal of him, as a worker and as a man.

It is the turn of his mind that has struck me, and that I think will interest you above all men. Quite of his own accord he is drawn to the very questions one would least look to find occupying a hill lad: to the governance of peoples, to what I can only call philosophy, and, above all, to the composing of quarrels, the means by which a feud between village and village may be brought to rest without the shedding of blood. I have watched him talk a dispute into quietness where older and craftier men had done nothing but inflame it. It is the very matter of your own book; and it seems to me something worse than a pity to let so rare a turn of mind run to waste, untaught, in the hills.

I have spoken to him of England, and of your School, and of the new science of man as you have made it there. He showed a very real quickening of interest, and put questions to me that were much to the purpose. He has done this very work for me here, in little, this past year; and I am persuaded, and I do not say such a thing lightly, that two or three years under your hand would make of him something altogether out of the common: a man able to study his own people, and others, as no man come from outside them ever can, and to be of great use hereafter, both to them and to the Government that must deal with them.

And here I must trade upon your good nature. You will know far better than I can, at this distance, how such a thing is contrived: the matter of a place, of the entrance requirements, and, not least, of the cost, towards which I am prepared to go a fair distance out of my own pocket. Might I beg you to look into it on his behalf, and to tell me plainly whether the thing can be done at all, or whether I am merely dreaming under the Assam rains?

Of his character I can write without the smallest reserve. He is steady, modest, truthful, and wholly to be relied upon, and would, I am certain, do no discredit either to the School or to the friends who were good enough to take him up. Do write and tell me what you make of it; and forgive, as I have said, both the long silence and the asking together.

Yours sincerely,
J. P. Mills.
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Hony. Director of Ethnography, Assam.

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